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September 28, 2001

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
200-A Jamie L. Whitten Building
Washington, D. C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I would like to commend the Department of Agriculture (USDA) for its great progress in providing jobs for persons with disabilities. As the fastest growing partner in the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD) Program, your Department is demonstrating outstanding leadership and commitment. In fact, the JWOD Annual Report 2000 describes USDA as increasing its purchases by more than 100 percent over last year.

USDA's purchases in this program will again increase more than 100 percent over the last fiscal year according to the information in the Federal Procurement Data System. Purchases recorded in that system reflect \$56,000,000 in USDA purchases to date for Fiscal Year 2001. USDA ranks among the highest Federal agencies, with more than 2 percent of its purchases committed to JWOD compared to the long term government-wide average of less than 1/2 percent.

We both know how important these purchases are to persons with disabilities. JWOD Program is a tightly focused jobs program. The focus is on providing jobs to persons with disabilities who are unable to gain or keep employment without the specialized training or accommodations provided in the participating, community-based, nonprofit organizations under JWOD.

In Iowa alone, the JWOD program provided 120 people with 66,218 hours of work last year. This kind of assistance is extended nation-wide by USDA's actions. Purchases of everyday products and services such as canned vegetable oils, milk packaging, loan servicing, and facility support become life fulfilling opportunities for people.

I applaud the accomplishments of your Department in the JWOD program.

Sincerely,



Tom Harkin
Chairman